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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 13, 1999

DOD RELEASES RESULTS OF 1998 SURVEY OF HEALTH RELATED BEHAVIORS

The Department of Defense today announced the final results of its 1998 worldwide survey of health behaviors among military personnel. The report shows that the usage of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs are at the lowest rates since the surveys began measuring certain health-related behaviors in 1980.

This survey is the seventh in the series of confidential, anonymous standardized surveys which asks active duty servicemembers about various health behaviors, including the use of illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and at-risk sexual behavior. The survey also assesses selected national health status goals from the Department of Health and Human Services' *Healthy People 2000* objectives, the mental health status of the force, and specific health concerns of military women. More than 17,000 servicemembers, randomly selected to represent men and women in all pay grades of the active force throughout the world, completed the survey.

"When comparing this 1998 report to our earliest survey results, we recognize tremendous improvements in the past 18 years. Our continued emphasis on health promotion, safety, and disease prevention will help our servicemembers achieve personal best performances and force readiness," said Dr. Sue Bailey, assistant secretary of Defense for Health Affairs.

Between 1980 and 1998, the survey shows a continuing decline in the use of illegal drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes by military personnel. When first surveyed in 1980, 27.6 percent of the active force acknowledged use of illegal drugs during the month prior to being questioned. In 1998, 2.7 percent reported using illegal drugs. Heavy drinking declined from 20.8 percent in 1980 to 15.4 percent on 1998, while cigarette smoking declined from 51.0 percent to 29.9 percent in the same period.

As encouraging as these trends are, however, the declines between 1995 and 1998 were not significant. The amount of heavy drinking, in fact, (five or more drinks per occasion at least once a week) remained problematic in 1998. The military's smoking rate remains about ten percentage points above the *Healthy People 2000* objective of 20 percent.

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Healthy People 2000 is the federal government's national health agenda. Its aim is to prevent unnecessary disease and disability and to achieve a better quality of life for all Americans. *Healthy People 2000* calls for individuals, families, communities, health professionals, the media, and government to share the responsibility to improve the nation's health profile. Of the 383 *Healthy People 2000* objectives, DoD has identified 45 as being particularly relevant to military personnel, and 17 of these objectives are measured in the 1998 survey.

Other key findings from the survey include the following:

- * The average daily amount of alcohol consumed by military personnel has declined by 47 percent over the past 18 years. The percentage of abstainers and light/infrequent drinkers has increased from 25.6 percent in 1980 to 43.2 percent in 1998.
- * The increase in past-year cigar and pipe smoking between 1995 and 1998 was significant: from 18.7 percent to 32.6 percent. Although the majority of this behavior occurred infrequently (less than once a week) this large increase is a concern.
- * Military personnel met or exceeded five of 17 selected *Healthy People 2000* objectives in 1998: overweight for personnel age 20 or older, strenuous exercise, seat belt use, Pap smears ever received, and Pap smears received in the past three years. However, the percentage of overweight personnel in both age categories (under 20 and 20 or older) increased between 1995 and 1998.
- * Military personnel described their military duties as more stressful than their family or personal lives. The most frequently indicated stressor for both men (19.5 percent) and women (19.5 percent) was family separation.
- * Personnel with higher levels of stress were more likely than those with lower levels of stress to work below normal performance levels and to incur injuries due to accidents in the work place.
- * The three most commonly used strategies for coping with stress and depression were: 1) adopting a problem-solving approach; 2) seeking social support; and 3) engaging in physical activity. However, nearly a quarter of military personnel used alcohol to cope with stress and depression.
- * Although positive coping strategies were common among those who showed depressive symptoms, a disturbingly high percentage of this group (18.3 percent) had considered suicide or self-injury as a way of coping.
- * There is a strong relationship between heavy alcohol use and mental health problems. Heavy users of alcohol had more problems with stress, mental health issues, and were more likely to exhibit depressive symptoms than those who did not drink.

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* Approximately 17 percent of personnel had perceived a need for mental health care in the 12 months prior to the survey, but only about half of them received this care.

* About one-third (31.8 percent) of military women reported being under a "great deal" or a "fairly large amount" of stress related to being a woman in the military.

* Approximately 90 percent of military personnel had received a dental check-up in the past 12 months.

* Some 8.1 percent of military personnel had experienced at least one of eight gambling-related problems in their lifetime, and 2.2 percent experienced at least three of these problems, the level constituting probable pathological gambling.

"With the Service surgeons general, we now have a Prevention, Safety, and Health Promotion Council whose purpose it is to help our military men and women and their families enhance their health and be a population of healthy military communities," stated Bailey.

The 1998 survey was conducted under contract by the Research Triangle Institute. The final report is available from the National Technical Information Service (NTIS) and the Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC). The NTIS phone number is 1-800-553-6847/6000 or (703) 605-6050. E-mail orders may be placed at the following address: **orders@ntis.fedworld.gov**. Cite publication number PB99-132086 when requesting the full report (364 pages) and PB99-132078 for the Highlights version (137 pages). To order from DTIC, call (703) 767-8274 -- cite ADA361903 for the full report and ADA361901 for the Highlights version. Previous survey reports from this series may also be obtained from these sources. The Highlights version is available on the worldwide web at: **<http://www.tricare.osd.mil/readiness/wellhealth.html>**.

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